

IN THE CLAIMS

Please amend the claims as follows:

1. (Currently amended) An assembly for treating incontinence comprising:
an elongate needle that is sized and shaped to be initially inserted through an abdominal incision and to then emerge from a vaginal incision, the needle having an insertion end and an end opposite the insertion end,
a sling for implantation in the body during an incontinence procedure, and
a coupler having an axis, [the coupler having] a first end, and a second end with surfaces for conveniently and securely connecting the coupler to the insertion end of the needle by moving the coupler and insertion end of the needle together, and said coupler comprising a lumen adapted to receive said needle.

2. (Currently amended) An assembly according to claim 1, wherein said needle is attached to said coupler such that the coupler and needle combination provides a Separation Force of at least about fifteen pounds ~~wherein after the needle is connected to the coupler, the assembly has a Separation Force of at least about fifteen pounds.~~

3. (Currently amended) An assembly according to claim 2, wherein said coupler and needle combination provides a Separation Force of at least about thirty pounds ~~wherein after the needle is connected to the coupler, the assembly has a Separation Force of at least about thirty pounds.~~

4. (Original) An assembly according to claim 2 wherein, the assembly has an Insertion Force of no more than about fifteen pounds.

5. (Original) An assembly according to claim 4 wherein, the assembly has an Insertion Force of no more than about ten pounds.

6. (Original) An assembly according to claim 5 wherein, the assembly has an Insertion Force of no more than about eight pounds.

7. (Original) An assembly according to claim 1 wherein the coupler is sized and shaped to be connected to the needle after the insertion end of the needle emerges from the vaginal incision.

8. (Original) An assembly according to claim 1 wherein the sling includes an insertion sheath and the first end of the coupler is attached to the sheath.

9. (Original) An assembly according to claim 1 wherein the tip of the insertion end of the needle is substantially blunt.

10. (Currently amended) A coupler for use in an incontinence procedure that utilizes a sling and an elongate needle that is sized and shaped to be initially inserted through an abdominal incision and to then emerge from a vaginal incision, the needle having an insertion end, the coupler comprising:

an elongate body having an axis,

a first end and a second end, [[and]]

surfaces for conveniently and securely connecting the coupler to the insertion end of the needle by moving the second end of the coupler and the insertion end of the needle together in a substantially axial fashion, and

a lumen configured to receive said needle ~~wherein after the needle is connected to the coupler, the connected coupler and needle have a Separation Force of at least about fifteen pounds.~~

11. (Original) A method of treating incontinence in a female patient comprising the steps of providing a first needle that is sized and shaped to be initially inserted through an abdominal incision and to then emerge from a vaginal incision, the needle having an insertion end and an end opposite the insertion end,

providing a coupler having an axis, the coupler having a first end and a second end with surfaces for conveniently and securely connecting the coupler to the insertion end of the needle,

providing a second needle that is sized and shaped to be initially inserted through a vaginal incision and to then emerge from an abdominal incision; the second needle being attached to a synthetic surgical mesh having first and second ends and a plurality of holes that are sized and shaped to afford tissue ingrowth, and a removable synthetic insertion sheath associated with the surgical mesh,

creating at least one vaginal incision,

creating at least one abdominal incision,

initially passing the first needle through the abdominal incision and then through the vaginal incision,

connecting the second end of the coupler to the insertion end of the first needle,

connecting the first end of the coupler to the second needle; and

guiding the second needle from the vaginal incision to the abdominal incision with the first needle to implant the sling.

12. (Previously presented) An assembly according to claim 1 wherein said elongate needle comprises a sharp tip at said insertion tip and said coupler is adapted to receive and engage said sharp needle to provide a firm engagement and attachment between said needle and said coupler.

13. (Previously presented) An assembly according to claim 1 wherein said elongate needle comprises predetermined surfaces, and said coupler comprises complementary internal surfaces allowing for interlocking of said needle surface and said coupler surface to provide a firm engagement and attachment between said needle and said coupler.

14. (New) A coupler according to claim 10, wherein said coupler is adapted to provide a Separation Force of at least about fifteen pounds when connected to said needle.

15. (New) A coupler for use in an incontinence procedure that utilizes a sling and an elongate needle that is sized and shaped to be initially inserted through an abdominal incision and to then emerge from a vaginal incision, the needle having an insertion end, the coupler comprising:

an elongate body having an axis,

a first end and a second end, and

means for conveniently and securely connecting the coupler to the insertion end of the needle by moving the second end of the coupler and the insertion end of the needle together in a substantially axial fashion.